

# SUPERDRUNK

## Able To Fall Off Tall Buildings

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Coming home from long or unexpected under-way periods often can lead to excessive revelry as Sailors try to make up for lost time by cramming a lot of partying into one night. The result can be liberty incidents and injuries.

My ship was returning to its homeport of Gaeta, Italy, from three weeks off the coast of western Africa. We had had fewer than 24 hours to prepare for this cruise, which came in the middle of a holiday leave period. Before leaving, a friend had planned a joint birthday party for her husband and me. Guests had been notified, and the menu had been set when the order came, sending us “haze grey and underway.” With the birthday party canceled, many of us now were anxious to get off the ship and into the bars.

The night began innocently enough—dinner at a local restaurant and everybody meeting at a bar for a few drinks. The few drinks quickly turned into many, though, and the evening soon spun out of control. By the end of the night, I had ingested a huge amount of alcohol before leaving the bar about 2:30 a.m. to return to my apartment alone.

I made it back to my apartment OK but couldn't remember how I got there. When I opened the door, my attention immediately was drawn to the floor in the main hallway of the apartment. It was covered with white plaster dust and water that appeared to have leaked from the building's roof, which was being replaced. Besides being very drunk, I became very angry and stormed out of my apartment and up the stairs to the roof.

I stepped onto the rooftop, which was covered by tarps weighted down with bricks and slabs of concrete. Obviously, it was a little dark up there at 3

o'clock in the morning. What I hoped to discover is anyone's guess, but I was drunkenly determined to do something about the mess in my apartment. While walking around the perimeter of the roof, I tripped on one of the weights and fell to my knees. I subsequently lost my grip on the keys to my apartment and only could watch as they went flying off the side of the building. The keys landed behind a white metal fence that surrounded most of the building on the ground level.

Without those keys, I couldn't get back in my apartment. I should have gone back inside the building, walked back down the stairs or taken the elevator to the garage, hopped the 4.5-foot fence, and retrieved my keys. But I suddenly had a better idea.

The construction workers had erected scaffolding up one side of the building for transporting things up to the roof. The scaffolding happened to straddle the fence and conveniently was located on the side where I had dropped my keys. I figured, “What the heck? Since I'm up here, I might as well just monkey down the side of the building and grab my keys.”

I probably should mention here that my building has four floors and stands about 50 feet high. Shortly after passing the fourth-floor balcony of my living room, I lost my grip on the outside rails of the scaffolding and plummeted toward the ground. En route, I hit the left side of my torso hard on the edge of wooden planking. I came to an abrupt halt—not lying flat on the ground but standing straight up, or what at first seemed like standing straight up.

I quickly realized, though, that I couldn't move anywhere because my feet weren't touching the ground. I could hear the seat of my jeans tear whenever

I tried to move, so I reached behind me to see what was wrong. The six-inch metal pole extending from the top crosspiece of the fence had caught my pants and was keeping me from touching the ground.

I was upset at first because I was wearing my favorite pair of jeans, and they appeared to be ruined. I soon forgot that problem, though, when my continuing investigation revealed the upper part of my thigh was sticky with what felt like blood. It turned out that the pole not only had caught my jeans, it had impaled my left butt cheek. It entered the underside of the cheek and tore through the top. As I tried to lift

and forfeiture of a half-month's pay, along with much well-deserved ribbing by my shipmates and friends.

I came away from this incident with several lessons learned. The most obvious, of course, is not to overindulge or abuse alcohol. Even in a sober state, I should not have been on that roof at night, if at all. I should have waited until the next day and called the landlord about the mess in my apartment. Having gone to the roof and dropped my keys, I should have called the local NSA security who could have gotten me in my apartment or given me a ride back to my ship. And, I definitely should not have been climbing



myself off the fence, I started losing consciousness. My memory then became a mix of pain, Italian police, ambulances, and hospitals.

The next morning, I awoke with stitches in two places on my rear, some broken ribs, and other assorted bruises, bumps and abrasions. I spent the next two weeks in Naples, TAD to the naval hospital in Gricignano, and missed an underway period. I visited a doctor daily and was poked, prodded and continuously reminded of how lucky I had been. I easily could have landed headfirst on that fence or impaled a vital organ, instead of my butt. I also paid for my irresponsible actions with 30 days' restriction

around on that rickety, Italian scaffolding 40 or 50 feet in the air, no matter what the reason.

More than four months have passed since my incident, and I still have aches and pains, but I'll gladly live with them, given what could have happened to me. ■

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